**Some international students pay for admissions app help**

By [Danielle Brody](http://www.udreview.com/search?q=Danielle%20Brody)

**Published:**Monday, November 21, 2011

Junior Haitao Zhang can hold a conversation in English, and he earned an A on his last speech for his public speaking class this semester. However, three years ago he failed his Test of English as a Foreign Language, which he took in China. His family paid a college application agency approximately $4,000 to prepare his application to the university, which included writing his essay, and he was accepted.

"It's very hard for a high school student to apply in English," Zhang said. "The English is limited, so it's hard to apply. Most of the parents do not speak English as a second language, so there is no place to find help, we just simply go to the agencies and ask for help."

The number of Chinese undergraduate students enrolled in American universities has grown by 43 percent from last year, according to the Institute of International Education's Open Doors report. Officials from the university's admissions department and the English Language Institute have recently been recruiting from China, and the number of Chinese university students rose from eight in 2007 to 517 this year.

In China, American degrees are highly valued. Chinese agencies that inform students about universities abroad, help them prepare their applications and train them for their visa interview at the American Embassy are a growing business.

The extent these agencies are helping students is being increasingly called into question after both the New York Times and The Chronicle of Higher Education reported that officials at these institutions write students' personal essays, fake documents and receive payments from universities.

Lou Hirsh, director of admissions at the university, said the admissions office, which handles international applications, is aware of these application agencies and has relationships with them, mostly to discuss the university's viability to international students. The university does not pay them, he said, but the families do.

Zhang said the agency did everything for him, expediting a process which might have taken him two months to complete. Even if he didn't use an agency, he would have asked someone else for help, and would still have wanted to pay them.

Hirsh said the increased number of agencies is a response to the growth of the college-aged students' population in China. He said while the purpose of these agencies—to help students through the application process—is legitimate, he realizes their practices could be an area of concern.

"It's not the agents themselves that are the problem, there is a difficulty with whether they're overstepping some bounds," Hirsh said. "There are two really big issues; one of them is the question of being paid by institutions and the other, somewhat more serious, issue is the authenticity of the documents."

He said admissions uses agencies such as the Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers and World Education Services to verify application information and check for forgery. The organizations validate the authenticity of documents by confirming institutions in the application exist, retrieving original documents and ensuring the validity of students' information.

"Our major concern of course is obviously transcripts," Hirsh said. "We want to be sure that this is indeed the work the student has done in his or her home institution, not some fabrication."

Hirsh said although there may be questions about international students' applications, the international students have comparable grades to those of out-of-state students.

When international students apply to the university, they can choose from one of two routes, Hirsh said. If their English is strong enough, they can apply directly to the university. They submit their essay, transcript, summary of educational experiences and

Test of English as a Foreign Language score, or the British equivalent, International English Language Testing System. The minimum TOEFL score is 90 out of 120 points.

International students must also include a bank statement and financial information to proving they have the funds to pay tuition. If admitted, the admissions officers will sign an I-20 form, which allows them to receive their visa, and they are enrolled at the university like any American student.

If students have strong grades but do not know English well enough to pass the TOEFL, they can apply through the Conditional Admission Program. If accepted, they must take a placement test on arrival at the English Language Institute, an intensive language school which teaches reading and writing. They take classes there they are ready to begin regular university classes.

"They've done everything they're supposed to do in their home country to prepare for college, except they just don't have strong enough English scores," said Nadia Redman, assistant director of the English Language Institute. "It's the university's way of being flexible with international students, to enable them to be admitted without punishing them basically for the fact that they don't have strong English the way that you and I have strong English."

Each level may take two months, and each two-month session's tuition costs $2,800, Redman said. She has seen the number of Chinese students enrolled in the ELI program grow after she attended a recruitment trip in 2008. She said the institute received 30 Chinese students' applications a week for the CAP program, and that Chinese students make up 30 percent of the 600 students in ELI.

Redman said partnering with overseas educational counselors is an industry standard. ELI has local consultants abroad which recruit students to the program and guide them through the college search process.

Jianguo Chen, director of the Confucius Institute at the university, said he left China to earn his Ph.D at the University of California 23 years ago. In 1988, the application process was more competitive than it is today, and students could only study abroad if they secured government funding or had a fellowship, he said. Now, students who come from China's growing middle class can pay their own tuition.

"Unlike these students, you see, they're self-funded, to the point that they can pay for people to prepare their essay, their application essay, as the article indicated," Chen said. "So it's a completely, completely different scenario."

Hirsh said the university does not offer financial aid to international students because it is not economically possible.

Chen said many students who study in America are known as the children of rich families. Many have a "rosy future," he said.

"They're here simply because my parents want me to, and because this degree [is] a golden degree, so when they go back it's kind of a passport, along this path to social success," Chen said.

Junior Yuchan Liu, originally from northeast China, has noticed many Chinese students attending American universities because of parental pressure. They do not get involved in campus activities, and often only spend time with each other. Liu is a resident assistant in George Read and said she has many American friends, but also said she is considered weird by other Chinese students. She wanted to come to America, and has immersed herself in American culture to learn the language.

"You pay a lot to study abroad, so if you make your own decision, you really work hard," Liu said. "On the other side, that means if you don't make the decision by yourself and you just want a degree or your parents ask you to go here, you don't have the power. If you want to try to push yourself into a different culture, it's so hard."

She understands why students would use agencies to assist them in the application process because many do not know about international schools. She spent much of her final year in high school at an English institution in China, where she prepared her application to the university.

"I wrote my own essay, but I asked my [English teacher] to revise it lots of times," Liu said. "Lots of times, seriously."

Chen, who teaches a Chinese literature class, said some of his Chinese students cannot write essays. He holds individual meetings to help them translate their ideas into words.

"Their writing ability's not that good," he said. "I know they may have good ideas, you can tell. But the way they present that idea is so simplistic."

Zhang said he graduated from the ELI in eight months. His only complaint was that he did not have many English-speaking partners to practice with.

Liu said Chinese teaching styles are very different from American styles. In China, students are not supposed to ask questions because it is considered a waste of time. Redman said the ELI acknowledges these differences. Chinese students are used to being quiet in class and while taking exams, she said.

Redman said that for some students, the transition between different cultural teaching styles is difficult on many levels.

"We're asking them basically to adopt a whole different approach to academics," she said. "So we help them here to start learning what that is and to become adjusted to American educational life, basically, and it's everything from presentations, note-taking, writing essays, working in projects and things like that."

Zhang said his freshman year was difficult because he did not know the right way to prepare for class.

"There is a rumor that the educational system in the [U.S.] is very easy—you don't need to do work, just show up, you will be fine," he said. "Actually, no, that's not the way. You have to study hard."

He said ELI graduates sometimes choose to live with students of similar heritage, making their assimilation into American culture more complicated.

"I don't know why they're struggling, because we pretty much took the same system," Zhang said. "I think most of the people who cannot speak English well, they are not trying to get involved with people, and I know a lot of students, international students try living together, they feel comfortable in that way. If you live with someone who [does not have a] different race, different culture, it's probably very comfortable. But there is no way that you can improve your English."

He said the ELI helped him learn English, and his skills improved by interacting with American students. He is always learning new words, he said, like that "significant" also means "important."

"If I think back, three years ago, if I had the English I have today, I probably can apply by myself," Zhang said. "It should be easy."

http://www.udreview.com/some-international-students-pay-for-admissions-app-help-1.2713982?pagereq=1#.TugDLTug5c0